MONOGRAPH

ON

STONE-CARVING

IN BENGAL.

BY

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Calcutta:

THE BENGAL SECRETARIAT BOOK DEPÔT.

1906.

[*Price—Inlian, Re. 1-8 ; English, 2s. 3d.*]

Published at the BENGAL SECRETARIAT BOOK DEPÔT,
Writers' Buildings, Calcutta.

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MONOGRAPH ON STONE-CARVING

IN BENGAL.

The subject of this monograph, as ordered by Government, was "Stone-Carving and Inlaying," but from the reports of District Officers it does not appear that the art of inlaying is practised anywhere in the Province. The Collector of Midnapore reported that some inlaying was in progress in a Muhammadan tomb in the Mirza Mahalla of Midnapore, but further inquiry showed that the "inlay" was not of stone, but glass set in chunam. Stone-inlaying is not an indigenous art anywhere in India. It does not, I believe, appear in any building previous to the Muhammadan invasions. It was first introduced by the Arabian stone-workers, but was not used extensively until the building of the great mosque of Fatehpur-Sikri by Akbar, which, according to an inscription on it, was intended as a copy of the "Holy Place at Mecca." In Jahangir's time stone-inlaying became the fashionable method of architectural surface decoration as a substitute for painted tiles and tile Mosaic, and by Shah Jahan's reign the process has been so thoroughly learnt by Indian artisans that the most skilful inlayers employed in the decoration of the Taj were Hindus from Kanauj. In Hindu buildings, however, inlaying was never largely used, so that on Aurangzib's accesion, when the Mogul Court discouraged the luxury and extravagance of former times, this art rapidly declined. For some generations later the palaces of Hindu Princes in Rajputana gave desultory employment to the descendants of Jahangir's and Shah Jahan's craftsmen; but as stone-inlaying was never adopted as a means of decoration for Hindu temples, the art soon became extinct, and is now carried on only by a few families at Agra and the neighbourhood, who are chiefly employed in making curiosities for tourists.

My monograph is thus necessarily restricted to the subject of stone-carving. I understand that the Government intend that the scope of these monographs should be confined chiefly to the description of the various industries as they now exist, and not extend to the whole ground of archæological and historical research.

The geological conditions of Bengal constitute it as essentially a country of brick and terra-cotta buildings. Excluding the sub-Himalayan districts, the area where stone becomes the most convenient and plentiful building material is only about a fourth of the Province, comprising roughly the Divisions of Orissa and Chota Nagpur. Even in the localities where stone is largely used for building purposes the development of the art of carving in these materials generally implies the existence of settled communities and a certain degree of civilization, for, when durability is not the most important consideration, wood, on account of the greater facility with which it can be worked, will always be preferred to stone for purposes of decoration.

In very early times when the greater part of Northern India was covered with vast forests, and transport of stone for long distances was impossible, wood was the chief building material over the greater part of the country; but when the builders in wood came across convenient quarries of sandstone they found in it a substitute which would be cut and worked almost as easily and exactly by the same method as their own material. The red sandstone of the United Provinces and the Punjab, especially, could be easily cut into curved beams for roofs or into thin slabs for panels and used for all the constructional forms which are generally only adapted to wood. From these conditions were evolved some of the most prominent features of the stone architecture of Northern India, which even in the present day retains a good deal of the character of its wooden prototypes, both in the construction and in the treatment of the decoration. In its technical treatment the sandstone carving of the Punjab and Rajputana

is purely the style of wood-workers. It is only in localities where the native builders had to deal with coarse-grained and more refractory stones that they were compelled to adopt the technique and forms of construction which are specially characteristic of stone work.

It is not to be supposed that the oldest Buddhist stone buildings, which are so obviously copies of wooden types represent the earliest attempts at stone construction by Indian builders; they probably only indicate that the builders coming to a place where a stone which could be easily worked with carpenter's tools was plentiful, adopted it as the most convenient material. In the present day there is no distinction in caste between a wood-carver and a stone-carver.. The same man frequently works at both wood-carving and stone-carving, and the tools and process used in either work are almost the same.

Within the area in Bengal which may be described as a stone-building country, it is practically only in Orissa, under the flourishing native dynastics first established in the early centuries of the Christian era, that a great style of stone-architecture and stone-carving has developed. The splendid antiquities of Orissa have often been described. In the ornamentation of the hundreds of temples, monasteries, and other works of stone which were built in the course of many centuries in the districts of Cuttack and Puri, the Orissa carvers acquired the most extraordinary technical skill in architectural decoration Hindu art has known.

There is pitiful remnant of this splendid art still struggling for existence all over the Orissa Division, but unless Government adopt some more effective measures for preserving it than those hitherto employed it is not likely to survive many years. There are carvers still to be found whose work, in spite of all the discouraging conditions which surround them, is hardly inferior in artistic perception and technical skill to that of their predecessors. A few of them have been lately employed by the Archæological Department in restoring

ancient carvings at Kanarak and elsewhere, and the Director-General in his report for 1902-1903 says (page 46) that "the work of the modern stone-mason, a native of Bhubaneswar, does not fall much behind the old work, except that modern restorations of human and animal figures are less graceful than their older models." If this employment were of a permanent kind no better means could be found for reviving Indian stone-carvers' art, but unfortunately there is no prospect that it will afford them anything but temporary existence.

I am able to endorse fully Mr. Marshall's appreciation of modern Orissa carving. It is often not very inferior to the old work. In style it is much more interesting than the better known sandstone carving of Rajputana and the Punjab, which is often monotonous and more suggesive of furniture than of architectural decoration. While the Orissa carvers are in no way inferior to those of North-West India in delicate surface ornamentation, they have not hampered themselves by the limitations of a wood-carver's technique, but have fully realized the technical possibilities of their material for producing bold effects of light and shade suitable for architectural work.

I will take the work of a carver named Chintamani Mahapatra, of Pathurisahi in Puri town, to illustrate the present condition of the craftsmen and the style of their art. I found him and his sons employed in making small soapstone-carving by the sale of which they now earn a living. They generally work in soapstone obtained from Dompara near Cuttack, because it is the easiest material to work with and because the prices their work obtains in the bazar are generally very small. Occasionally however, they work in a potstone obtained from the Nilgiri Hills near Balasore, which is much more difficult to carve. The soapstone-carvings are generally coloured black to make them resemble the more expensive work in handstone, a process which depreciates the real artistic merit which many of them possess. I



PLATE 1.

SOAPSTONE CARVING FROM PURI.



PLATE II.

CARVED DOORWAY OF THE EMAR MATH, PURI.

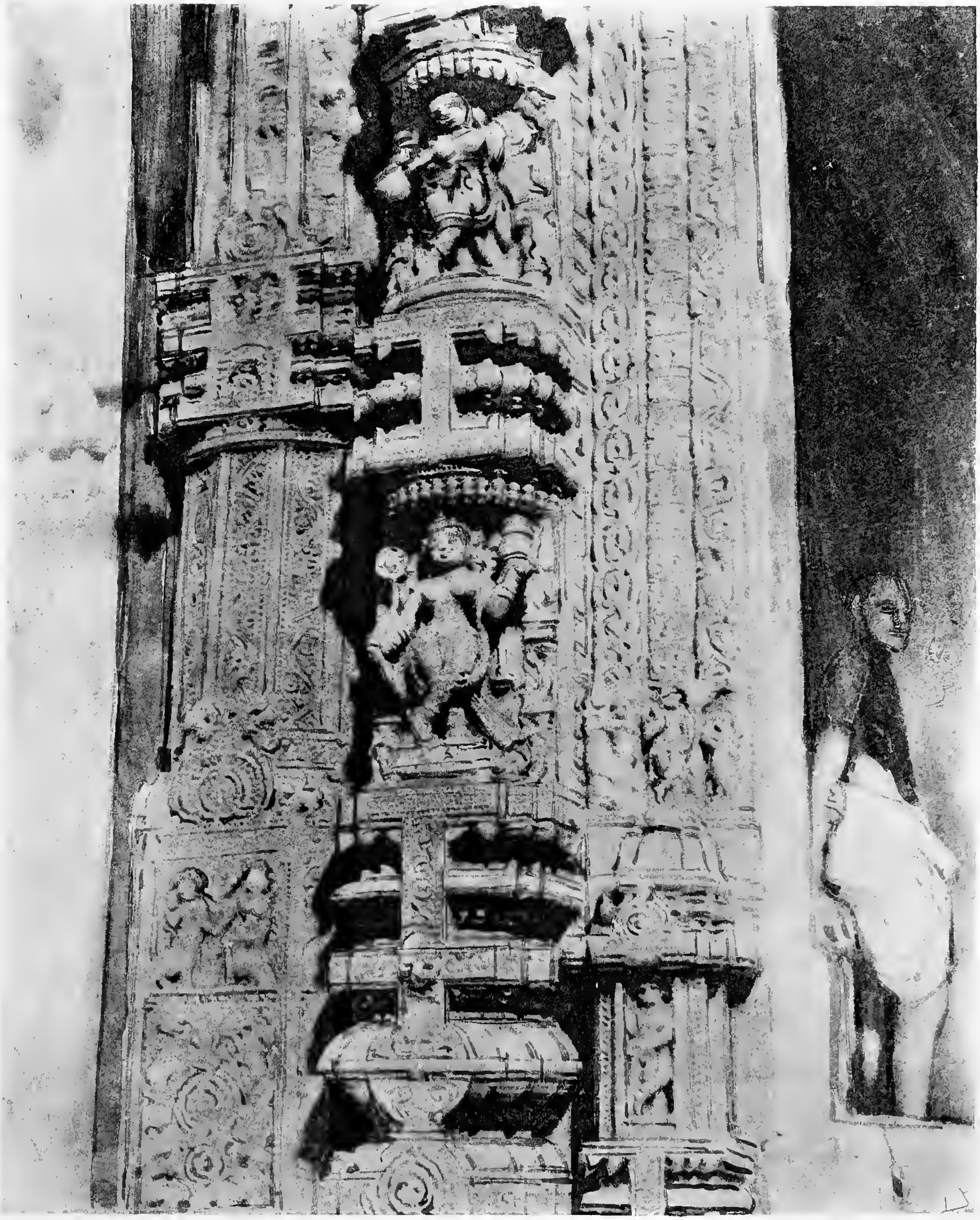


PLATE III.

DETAILS OF THE CARVING ON THE EMAR MATH, PURI.

purchased from him for a rupee and-a-half a charming little sculptured group of Krishna and the Gopies which he had just finished in soapstone (Plate I). Fortunately the blacking process had not been applied. The carving only represents two or three days' work, but it is full of animation and artistic feeling, while the composition and the combination of gradations of relief are admirable. There are five or six other families of stone-carvers in Puri who live by the same kind of work, as there is now no demand for the really fine architectural carving which they can produce. There are several splendidly carved stone doors in Puri town, executed within the last fifteen or twenty years by Chintamani and by two other stone-masons or carvers called Mahadeba Maharana and Kapil Mahapatra, also of Puri. Plates II and III show one of the doorways of Emar Math, a Vaishnavite monastery, which would bear comparison which the carving of the Mediæval Gothic cathedrals in Europe. The delicate surface carving in low relief is admirably contrasted with the bold cutting of the pilasters supporting the projecting cornice over the doorway. It is altogether a fine piece of work, worthy of the best traditions of Orissa architecture.

Plate IV is another good example of the same men's work, one of a series of columns supporting the verandah of a private house. Since these were completed, about ten or fifteen years ago, the men have been compelled to subsist on the cheap soapstone work before described, as there is now no demand for finished sculpture of a better class.

It is deplorable that the standard of public taste in Bengal should have fallen so low that skilled artists of this stamp have no employment for their best talent; while the lowest class of commercial Italian statuary, incomparably inferior to the art which these men can produce, is in regular demand at prices which would make all the sculptors in Orissa rich beyond their wildest dreams. The very fine carved doorway shown in Plates II and III, which is an incomparably

finer example of architectural decoration than any to be found in Calcutta, is said to have cost only about Rs. 1,200, or less than is often paid for a common garden-statue, a simpering Venus, or a vulgar ballet-girl in marble. Among the houses of the wealthy and educated classes in Calcutta there is not one that contains columns so well designed and carved as that shown in Plate IV, the workmanship of which would cost about Rs. 50.

In other places in the Puri district a certain number of stone-carvers have found employment lately in the building or restoration of Hindu temples. At Bhubaneswar, Raja Rani Moktaswar, Sidhaswar, Bhaskareswar, Brahmeswar, and Pursarameswar have been recently restored, and various sculptured figures have been replaced. The Collector reports that at Tangi and Bolegarh in the Khurda subdivision two temples have recently been built in which there is a certain amount of carving. Stone-carving is also carried on to some extent in Haldia, Ghatikia, Tangi, Narangurh, and other villages in the Khurda subdivision.

In the district of Cuttack, also, the fine old art still exists, though it is said to be steadily declining for want of patronage. At Jajpur, the ancient capital of Orissa, the work of restoring the Temple of Biroja has been carried on for the last twenty or thirty years, the expense being undertaken by a *Babaji* who has spent his life in begging for funds. The carving is done by a local artist, who is paid four annas a day. Plate V illustrates some of the beautiful work he has done.

At Aul in the jurisdiction of the Kendrapara subdivision some stone-carving is now being executed for the Temple of Barahanath at the expense of the zamindar of that place.

The total number of families of stone-carvers in the district of Cuttack is said to be about 38. Of this, 26 live at Banki, 10 in Jajpur, and 2 in Kendrapara.



PLATE IV.

A CARVED COLUMN, PURI.

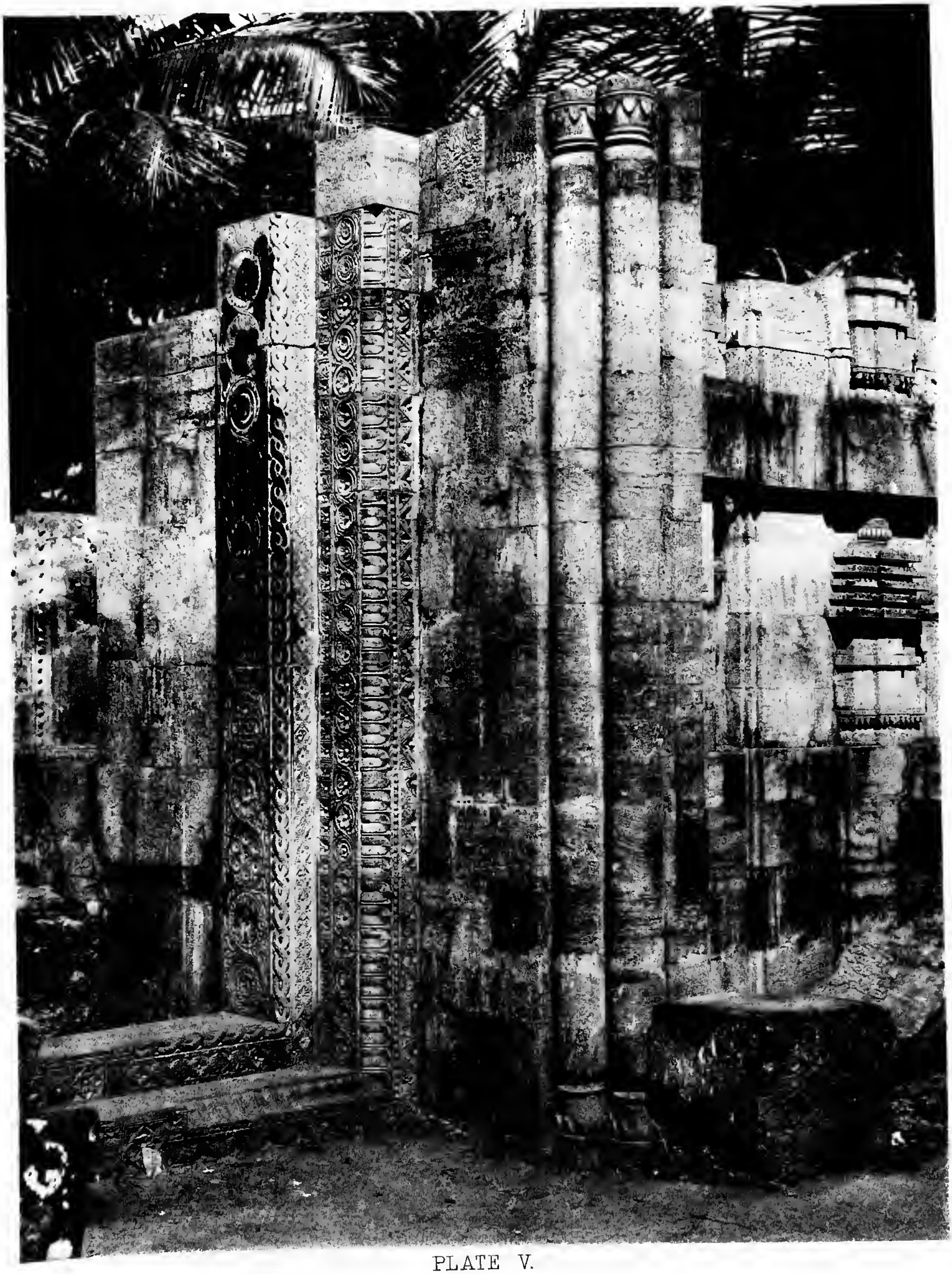


PLATE V.

CARVED DOORWAY AT THE BIROJA TEMPLE JAJPUR, ORISSA.

The average wages earned by the stone-carvers in the Orissa Division is from four to eight annas a day.

Besides stone-carving proper, there is a good deal of architectural work carried on in Puri and probably in other places in the Orissa Division in a kind of conglomerate stone, too coarse-grained for fine carving, in which the ornamental details are roughly blocked out by the chisel and afterwards finished by a layer of fine stucco or chunam.

The process of applying fine plaster to stone work is a very ancient one in India, and is used for figure sculpture as well as for ornamental details. The chunam often serves as a ground for fresco painting, as in the well-known decoration of the Buddhist carvers of Ajanta. In Puri I noticed a number of finely designed pedestals or altars for the tulasi plant executed by this process, which in former times reached a very high degree of perfection. It is quite a distinct art to stone-carving and is not practised by ordinary stone masons. For a damp climate like that of Bengal this plaster work has the practical advantage of preventing moisture from penetrating through bricks and porous kind of stone.

Chota Nagpur.—Chota Nagpur, like Orissa, is geologically a stone-building country, but the population has never grown into large and flourishing communities, as in the great towns of ancient Orissa, and the stone-carvers' art does not appear to have been developed to any great extent locally.

There are a certain number of ancient temples and buildings at Jaganathpur and Chutia, a few miles from Ranchi, and at Nagar, about 49 miles distant, which are evidence of the existence of a local art of stone-carving in former times; but in the Mogul period the masons for building the forts at Palamau are said to have been imported from Jaipur in Rajputana. At the present time the masons of the district hardly ever do carving, but earn about three annas a day

by making cheap stone utensils, used chiefly by colliery coolies at Raniganj. The utensils, consisting of trays, cups, and bowls, are sold at prices varying from two pice to three annas. Between 70 and 80 families are engaged in this kind of work. The quarries from which the stone is taken are within the zamindaris of the Manki of Terai and Thakur of Mardhan, who lease out the right of working them. The vessels when made are brought by the masons to Kudadih and sold to a mercantile firm, Messrs. Mahamad Hossein & Co., which retails them to petty dealers. The value of the present outturn is said to be between Rs. 8,000 to Rs. 10,000 annually.

Gaya and Patna.—In these two districts, as in Chota Nagpur, stone-carving has become practically extinct, though various forms of working in stone are still carried on to some extent. There are still two families in Gaya town, the members of which are fairly expert carvers and occasionally do some architectural work. A bathing-ghât built with Chunar stone with some good carving on it which was finished in 1896 is a creditable piece of work, designed and constructed by one of them named Ganga Bishen. The expense was borne by the Gayawal, Chota Lal Sijwar, whose name is given to the ghât. The ordinary work of those two families is carving small idols, puja vessels, and animals, in which they show considerable skill and seem to earn a very fair income. The stone mostly used for this work is a rather hard potstone from a hill called Pathalkatti, 19 miles to the north of Gaya, where there are about 25 other families of stone masons who, with the exception of one man, Somi Ram, who does ornamental work, are all engaged in making plain stone utensils like those in Chota Nagpur. Their earnings are said to be from 6 to 8 annas a day. All these men, who profess to be Brahmans by caste, are said to be descendants of stone-carvers and stone-masons who were brought from Jaipur in Rajputana about 140 years ago to build the great Vishunpada

Temple in Gaya town. Their ancestors were expert artists, but they themselves have deteriorated so much from want of practice in the higher branches of their art that for any important architectural work carvers are now brought from other Provinces. There are several noticeable stone buildings now being constructed or recently finished in Gaya town, all by imported masons and carvers, and built of Chunar or Mirzapore stone. They have been designed and constructed entirely by native architects and builders. Among these are two dharamsalas for pilgrims built at the expense of Rai Suraj Mall Bahadur, a Marwari of Calcutta. One close to the railway station is just finished. The other now being built is in the Mahalla Tilha of the old town. Both of them are very well constructed and contain some excellent carving in the characteristic style of Mathura and Hathras of the United Provinces, whence the workmen are brought. As it is sufficiently well known and not a local style, I do not think it necessary to illustrate it in this Monograph. The cost of each of these dharamsalas is said to be about a lakh of rupees.

A still more important work is a temple dedicated to Radha Krishna, near the northern gate of the old town, begun about five years ago, and now nearing completion. It is designed and built by architects and masons from Jaipur at the expense of the present Gayawal, Babu Balgobind Lal Sen. Except that the architectural effect is marred by the use of thin iron columns to support the porch in front of the principal shrine, the building is an example of the best modern Jaipur work. It is very richly carved in the local style of Rajputana, fortunately not spoilt by attempts at imitations of Anglo-Indian ornamental design. The style is, as I have observed before, largely influenced by the technique of woodwork, and does not aim at the bold effect of light and shade combined with delicate gradations of relief which are so admirable in the

nearly extinct art of Orissa stone-carvers. The plain stonework of the interior of the principal shrine and part of the outside are being decorated in fresco work by the old Indian process alluded to above which I have been trying for several years to introduce into Calcutta. The wages of all these imported men are fairly good. The principal mistries who design and superintend the whole work get from Rs. 30 to Rs. 40 a month, while the ordinary masons and carvers earn from Rs. 15 to Rs. 25 a month. In the Patna district the conditions are very similar to those which obtain at Gaya. Clay and bricks are the ordinary building materials, and when any important architectural work requiring stonework is constructed, skilled masons and carvers are brought from outside the Province. The local masons occasionally carve small idols, selling from four annas to five rupees each, but their ordinary work is the cutting of grinding-stones, potters' wheels and making of stone utensils.

There are also a few lapidaries who cut glass for imitation jewellery, and cut and polish pebbles and crystals brought from Monghyr and Bhagalpur. Some of these are engraved with texts from the Koran and used as amulets. Further details are given in the schedule attached to this Monograph.

Calcutta.—There are a few firms in Calcutta, mostly located in Bentinck Street, engaged in supplying the demands for tombstones and monumental masonry, in which there is sometimes a certain amount of carving of no artistic interest, and it is always of a conventional type copied from mediocre European models. They employ altogether about 50 masons, whose wages vary from Rs. 10 to Rs. 25 a month. These men are brought from Monghyr, Patna, and Dinapore districts. They work both in stone and in marble, the latter mostly imported from Italy. For any important architectural work in which carving is used the masons are usually brought to Calcutta from Bombay; but owing to the same system of copying

mechanically conventional European types which they do not understand, the ornament they produce is always insipid and uninteresting and in most cases would be better left undone. For the offices of the Military Secretariat, completed this year, about 130 masons and carvers were employed. The stone used on the ground floor was brought from Mirzapore, and the masons who worked it came from the same place. They were paid from 12 to 14 annas a day. These men were designers and carvers as well as masons, but, as they only designed Indian ornament and the style of the building was Italian Renaissance, all the carving was entrusted to the masons brought from Bombay, paid Rs. 2 daily, who were only accustomed to copy European patterns. These they executed with the usual mechanical dexterity, but without any of the real feeling which belongs to original artistic work. This failure must inevitably result from a system which is entirely opposed to sound artistic principles.

TECHNIQUE.

The tools used by all stone-carvers in India are practically the same as those used by wood-carvers, and call for no special notice. The only difference is that the stone-carvers' mallets are heavier and weighted with lead to give the chisels and punches greater cutting power. Stone utensils, like cups and trays, are turned in the ordinary native hand lathe. The European process of "pointing," by which a sculptor's plaster model is mechanically reproduced in stone or marble, is not used by the native sculptors, as they always work directly on the stone.

THE FUTURE OF STONE-CARVING IN BENGAL.

It will be gathered from the facts I have stated that stone-carving, as a fine art, will soon cease to be indigenous in Bengal, unless some more effective measures are taken than those hitherto adopted by Government for the preservation of Indian art. The

aid hitherto given by Government towards Art Exhibitions and Art Museums has nearly always been misdirected, as it has only encouraged the production or *bric-a-brac*, cheap as art but dear as merchandise, for the European market. Real art, such as that of the Orissa stone-carvers, which is a valuable asset in a country's economic resources and a most important factor in national culture, derives no benefit, but rather suffers, from spasmodic and unorganized efforts which tend more towards satisfying the demand of a capricious and uninformed section of the public than to raising the general standard of taste. My experience of such exhibitions and art collections has been that the best work of Indian art workmen is very rarely represented in them.

The massive character of Orissa stone-carving makes it difficult to transport, and thus while the lighter sandstone-carving of the Punjab and Central Provinces is often in evidence at Indian exhibitions and in Museum collections, the better art of Orissa stone-carvers never appears. Moreover the time allowed for the preparation of Indian Exhibitions is invariably far too short, so that it is impossible to represent any of the best work except that which is in general demand and thus is in least want of advertisement.

The almost total extinction of the stone-carvers' art in Bengal may be attributed to three main causes:—

First—The exclusive use of European styles in public buildings so that there is no longer any employment for the hereditary native builders, unless they become mere copyists of the regulation designs. It follows from this that there is no employment for native stone-carvers in public buildings, except when they are converted from good artists into indifferent mechanics.

Secondly—The neglect of the study of Indian architecture in Indian Colleges of Engineering. The graduates of

these Colleges are largely employed in designing houses and palaces for Indian gentlemen of wealth and position. They naturally follow the styles of which they know most and which they see followed in public buildings, with the same disastrous results to Indian art.

Thirdly—The standard of public taste, which is so uneducated that it possesses no power of discriminating between good art and bad art, but merely follows the fashion of the day. This is principally due to the exclusiveness and narrowness of the system in Indian Universities, which, while nominally intended to provide a complete system of national culture, only recognizes Law, Engineering, Medicine, Science, and Literature as the learned professions, and ignores Art altogether, both as a means of general intellectual training and as a very important factor in national culture and material progress.

These are large questions which hardly come within the scope of this Monograph, but they will have to be dealt with in any serious attempt to develop Indian art industries.

For the present I would only suggest that in the new galleries which are shortly to be erected for the combined collections of the Calcutta Government Art Gallery and the Art Section of the Indian Museum, two of the inside doorways should be carved by the best men obtainable from Orissa. For that purpose I would propose that a fixed sum, say Rs. 3,000 should be set apart from the grant for purchases of works of Art in the coming year. The Art Gallery would then possess good examples of modern native stone-carving which might be the means of diverting some at least of the large sums which are

spent in Calcutta on inferior sculpture and architectural ornament towards the preservation of the splendid art of Orissa.

In concluding I must express my acknowledgments to Mr. E. F. GROWSE, I.C.S., Commissioner of Orissa, to Mr. H. P. CHRISTIAN, Deputy Collector, Bankipore, Babu GURU CHARAN LAL, Collectorate Clerk, Gaya, and Babu ABHOY PRASAD DAS, Deputy Collector, Cuttack, for valuable notes and information which I have made use of in this Monograph.

E. B. HAVELL.

Schedule showing the condition of the Stone-carving Industry in Bengal, 1905.

Locality.	Number of families employed.	Average earnings.	REMARKS.
ORISSA DIVISION.			
Puri District.			
Puri town	5 or 6 ...	4 to 8 annas ...	The best workmen are very excellent carvers, but as they do not find other remunerative work, they are compelled to make cheap soapstone idols for the bazar.
Bhubaneswar... ...	Do. ...	Ditto ...	The Temple of Bhaskareswar, Brahmeswar, Raja Rana Moktaswar Sidhaswar and Parsurameswar have lately been restored by local carvers, whose work is very good.
Tangi and Bolegarh ...	Exact number not returned.	......	Two temples have been constructed lately in these places in the Khurda subdivision.
Haldia ... ... Ghatikia ... ... Tangi ... ... Naranguth	Ditto ...	4 to 8 annas ...	Places in the Khurda subdivision where a certain amount of stone-carving is carried on.
Cuttack District.			
Jajpur	10 ...	Ditto ...	Some fine carving has been carried out in the last 20 or 30 years for the Temple of Biroja in Jaipur town, the cost of which has been defrayed by a *Babaji* who begs for funds.
Banki	26 ...	Ditto	
Kendrapara	2 ...	Ditto ...	At Aul in the Kendrapara subdivision some carving on the Temple of Barahanath is being executed at the expense of the zamindar.
Tributary Mahals.			
Khondpara	Not returned ...	4 to 8 annas a day.	Some fine carving has lately been executed on the front of the Jagganath Temple at the Garh of this Raja of the State.
CHOTA NAGPUR DIVISION.			
Ranchi district ...	About 70 ...	3 annas a day	These are common masons who make stone utensils used chiefly by the colliery coolies in Raniganj. The value of the yearly outturn is said to be between Rs. 8,000 and Rs. 10,000. The principal places of the industry are within the zamindari of the Manki of Terai and of the Thakur of Mardhan, who own the quarries. A firm of merchants at Kudadih act as distributing agents.
Manbhum District.			
Madanpur (pargana Panda)	Number not returned.	......	A few families of the masons who do similar work to the masons at Ranchi, but occasionally they carve also. About five years ago they did some carving for a temple in Chirkunda belonging to Nanda Gorai.

Schedule showing the condition of the Stone-carving Industry in Bengal, 1905—concld.

Locality.	Number of families employed.	Average earnings.	Remarks.
PATNA DIVISION.			
Patna	50 to 100 workers	4 to 12 annas a day.	The industry is chiefly confined to four firms of shop-keepers at Marafganj Ghât. The work consists of articles for domestic use, such as curry-stones, pestles, cups and other utensils, similar to those made in Chota Nagpur. Rough figures of Hindu gods, varying in prices from 4 annas to Rs. 5, are carved. There are also a few families of lapidaries, or hakkaks, who cut and polish stones for rings, ornaments and amulets. The carving of an ancient Muhammadan tomb at Manaer, 6 miles from Bihta railway station, has been lately restored at Government expense.
Gaya District.			
Pathalkatti	25 ...	6 to 8 annas a day.	Their ordioary work is the manufacture of stone utensils similar to those made in Patoa.
Sapneri	3 ...	Ditto ...	Ditto ditto.
Dhanmahva	1 ...	Ditto ...	Ditto ditto.
Gaya town	7 ...	Ditto ...	Two families of skilled carvers who make idols and occasionally do architectural work. The others do the same work as those at Patalkhatti. Two dharamsalas and a temple to Radha Krishna are now being built in the town. The carving on them is very good, but all the workmeu are brought from the United Provinces. The wages of these men vary from 8 annas to Re. 1 per day.
BURDWAN DIVISION.			
Katwa ... ... Dainhat	......	......	These are places in the subdivision of Katwa, in which there are a few stone-carvers who make rough Hindu idols.

B. S. Press—23272—500—17-8-1906—J. A. M.